



Field Guides Tour Report

Fall for Cape May I 2019

Sep 21, 2019 to Sep 27, 2019

Cory Gregory

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



The lighthouse at Cape May was a constant and beautiful backdrop to our fall migration tour. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Cape May is a spectacular place to witness migration and on this tour we could get a sense of exactly why. Although the weather was a bit settled, which translated to beautiful days, our trip did overlap with some fantastic migration spectacles at this world-famous birding hotspot. Pair that with the luxury of staying in just one hotel on tour, any choice of great local restaurants to eat at, and you have yourself a fun and enjoyable tour!

The front half of our tour in The Garden State took us to many places around Cape May where we got a sense for the layout and started to see signs of raptor migration. The hawkwatch platform performed and between the many Osprey, Merlin, and Bald Eagles we saw, there was equally as much activity on Bunker Pond where a myriad of ducks, swans, and geese gathered. In fact, we even saw an Eurasian Wigeon point blank! Forsythe NWR was well-worth the visit and we found ourselves surrounded by hundreds of terns, gulls, shorebirds galore, a flyby Red-headed Woodpecker, and even a couple of Clapper Rails kept an eye on us.

Later in the week though the weather turned and the faucet of migrating warblers got turned on full-blast. Notable experiences included walking along the road at the Northwood Center and being surrounded by a songbird flock containing no fewer than 13 species of warblers! Nearby areas like Higbee Beach were home to a slew of Gray Catbirds, falcons chasing each other, flocks of flickers, swarms of Bobolinks overhead, and even a couple of Ovenbirds waltzing around along the forest edge.

Another fun aspect of this tour was getting to ride the Osprey; the boat trip into Jarvis Bay where we got up-close views of terns, herons, Ruddy Turnstones, and a wealth of other coastal species tucked into the back-bay areas. In fact, the saltmarsh habitat near Cape May provided a couple of key species for us including the threatened Saltmarsh Sparrow as well as the strictly-coastal Seaside Sparrow.

All in all, this was a fun and quick tour and I want to thank you guys for making it so enjoyable. The small group size made it easy for us to navigate options and I want to thank each of you for coming along with Field Guides. Until next time, good birding!

- Cory

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a =

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – This familiar goose was common in many of the ponds and lakes in the area.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – A mainstay at Cape May Point State Park where there were always many visible from the hawkwatch platform. [I]

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Seen at Cape May Point State Park on our second day.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*) – This dabbling was also fairly common throughout our trip and we had sightings from Cape May Point State Park, Forsythe NWR, and Cox Hall WMA.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – Seen from both the hawkwatch platform at Cape May and then again at Forsythe NWR.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – Like the previous species, this dabbling was also seen on Bunker Pond as well as up at Forsythe NWR.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Mareca penelope*) – A report came in from the Plover Ponds at Cape May Point State Park and so we walked down and had a look. The views were fantastic!

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*) – We couldn't have gotten better looks at this handsome dabbling alongside the Eurasian Wigeon at Cape May Point State Park.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Common and familiar, this dabbling was tallied every day.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – A few of these dark dabblers were seen around the point but we had better studies up at Forsythe NWR.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – We didn't see a ton of these long-necked, slim dabblers. The only sightings came from Cape May Point State Park on our first day and then again from Forsythe NWR.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – This small dabbling was fairly common at Cape May and up at Forsythe NWR.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in urban areas. [I]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Fairly common throughout the tour and tallied nearly every day.

Apodidae (Swifts)

CHIMNEY SWIFT (*Chaetura pelagica*) – One of these insect-eaters rocketed overhead one morning at Higbee Beach.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Our best looks at this tiny species came from The Beanery where they perched in the fieldside vegetation for a few moments.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – We had a great show by a couple of these at Forsythe NWR when they waltzed down into the shaded edge of the tidal zone.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – It was a treat to see this species at Cape May where one was sneaking around in some of the vegetation at Bunker Pond.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Our boat trip tallied no fewer than 60+ of these large and bold shorebirds!

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Our first studies came from the Hereford Inlet area where quite a few of these were foraging out on the island alongside all the terns and gulls. We later saw more on our boat trip to Jarvis Sound on the Osprey.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – This is the small, brown-backed plover with a single breast band. They were fairly common at spots that had shorebirds such as Two Mile Landing, Jarvis Sound, and Forsythe NWR.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – This noisy and familiar plover was seen a few times including at The Meadows there at Cape May.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – A couple of these were mixed in with the shorebirds at Two Mile Landing but the views we had from the boat trip were hard to beat!

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*) – The birdy island offshore from the Hereford Inlet area hosted a few of these and one or two still had a touch of salmon color on the undersides.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Several dozen of these pale sandpipers were seen running around in the tidal zone on the Hereford Inlet island.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – A few of these plump, long-billed shorebirds were mixed in with other sandpipers at Two Mile Landing and at Forsythe NWR.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Our smallest shorebird, these yellow-legged sandpipers were seen at Two Mile Landing and at Forsythe NWR.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – It was great to see a couple of these newly-arrived migrants at Forsythe NWR.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – This medium-sized sandpiper was scoped at Forsythe NWR on our visit there.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Good numbers of these peeps were seen at Two Mile Landing, Forsythe NWR, and Jarvis Sound. Unlike the Least Sandpipers, these have black legs.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Slightly longer-billed than the previous species, a few of these peeps were mixed in with the flock at Two Mile Landing and Forsythe NWR.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A few of these longer-billed shorebirds were seen foraging on the sand island at Hereford Inlet during our birdy visit there.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – One of our visits to Two Mile Landing tallied a couple of these tail-bobbing shorebirds.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – A tall, sturdy *Tringa*, these were fairly common at Two Mile Landing, Forsythe NWR, and Jarvis Sound.

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – A whopping flock of 85+ were seen roosting at the Wetlands Institute during a high tide.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – The only couple we saw were along the auto-tour road at Forsythe NWR.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Wow, what a show off of Coral Avenue on our second day. A great number of these kleptoparasites were seen chasing gulls and terns.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant along the coast.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few of these were seen at Forsythe NWR and the Hereford Inlet island.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – A common gull, these were tallied every day.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We tracked down one of these on the beach one afternoon. Although it seemed to prefer to mingle amongst the people and not the gull flock, we were still able to enjoy good views that showed the yellow legs.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – A huge and common gull along the coast.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – We enjoyed good looks at this orange-billed tern several times including a flock of more than a dozen at Forsythe NWR.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – Good numbers of these were foraging offshore from Coral Ave during our birding there. We could appreciate the more extensive black on the head and the dark carpal bar shown on the wings, something the following species lacks.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – These were abundant for much of our tour around Cape May and up at Forsythe NWR. At the latter location, we tallied more than 300.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – This tour was a good one to study eastern terns. Included was spending time with this large and showy species. They were common especially along the beaches across the road from the hotel.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Flocks of these distinctive birds swirled around us and landed right in front of us allowing for amazing looks and scope views.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – This species of cormorant, the most common and most expected on our tour, was tallied every day.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AMERICAN BITTERN (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – We had a little luck and saw this species in flight once or twice.

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Common, tallied every day.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – This white heron was also common and tallied on each of our days.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – At high tide, we counted more than 90 at Two Mile landing which was an impressive number for the area.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We had quick success at The Wetlands Institute where we tallied no fewer than four of these sleek, slender herons.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One of these small, unobtrusive herons was working on swallowing a frog at Cape May Point State Park one morning.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – We scoped a youngster at The Wetlands Institute during our visit.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Our best views of this all-dark wading species came from the auto-loop at Forsythe NWR. However, a couple of these flew over Cape May Point State Park on our final morning as well.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – It was good to be able to compare this species with the following one in flight. These are shorter-tailed, with silver-tipped wings usually held flat.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common, tallied daily.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We saw lots of Osprey, especially from the Osprey (our boat trip)! These were a common sight overhead during our entire time at Cape May.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – This white-rumped, marsh-loving raptor was seen well at Forsythe NWR and then again as high-flyovers at the point later in the week.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – What a fantastic show! We were lucky to have huge numbers of these streaming overhead for several of our days allowing for great studies.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Much less common than the previous species, this larger, longer-tailed raptor was still spotted a number of times.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – It's always a treat to see this huge, majestic raptor soaring overhead. We had outstanding looks at some perched birds on the boat trip as well.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – We had a brief look at this uncommon *Buteo* soaring overhead from the Northwood Center one day.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – We spent a good bit of time at the hawkwatch platform at Cape May Point State Park and on one of our visits, we were treated to a good number of these mixed in with the migrants high overhead.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – This classic *Buteo* evaded us until our final morning when we visited Cox Hall WMA and found one soaring around the parking area.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – The dry, rapid rattle of this species was a familiar sound; we tallied this fish-eater on about half of our days.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – Quite an unusual species to see on tour! One of these flew by us as we started our birding at Forsythe NWR.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – This medium-sized woodpecker was spotted at a couple of different spots including The Beanery and Higbee Beach.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates pubescens*) – Our smallest woodpecker, this little guy was spotted at the Northwood Center one day and at The Beanery as well.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Quite an impressive number of these woodpeckers were migrating through during our tour. It wasn't unusual to see a treetop with a whole bunch of flickers perched in it!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Our most commonly-seen falcon on this trip, these were moving through in good numbers and it wasn't uncommon to see them zooming down the shoreline.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Wow, one of these zoomed through a flock of shorebirds at Forsythe NWR but it looked like it missed its target. We went on to see these speedy falcons fairly regularly throughout the trip.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We were lucky to spot this beefy falcon a couple of times including once along the beach across from the hotel, and another one migrating high overhead from the Northwood Center.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – One of these migrant flycatchers perched up on a snag at Higbee Beach during one of our visits.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Our first sighting of this flycatcher was a bird perched on a fence at the entrance to Forsythe NWR.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – These sneaky vireos tend to stay hidden but we caught a quick glimpse of one at Higbee Beach one morning.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Fairly common around Cape May during the second half of our tour.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – A familiar species, these were tallied nearly every day.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Easily identified by voice, these were seen on at least half of our days.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – This smaller, coastal species was easily identified by its different calls compared to American Crow.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – This migrant swallow will sometimes gather at Cape May in staggering numbers. We got just a brief flavor of this as we watched hundreds moving overhead at the point.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A couple of these fork-tailed swallows showed up at Forsythe NWR during our visit.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Parus carolinensis*) – The common chickadee in that part of NJ.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Heard and then seen nicely at Cox Hall WMA late in the tour.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – A trio of these small, brown wrens appeared for us on one of our visits to Higbee Beach.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – The rich, rolling song of these was a fairly common sound for us on tour.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – These long-tailed little sprites were fairly common for us on tour. At one point, a duo came down the dunes and foraged right around us at Coral Ave.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Rather sparse numbers for us, these were tallied on just one day from the Northwood Center.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – We heard one of these calling from Cox Hall WMA but oddly couldn't track it down. [*]

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Not as common as one might expect. For us, they were seen on just a couple of days including at Cox Hall WMA and at The Beanery.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – A common migrant through Cape May, these mimics were seen every day of the tour.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Although less common than the previous species, this long-tailed mimic was spotted at places like Higbee Beach, Cox Hall WMA, and The Beanery.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – One of these flashy guys came and found us at the hawkwatch platform on our first outing.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Widespread, seen every day. [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – A couple of tight flocks of these berry-loving birds flew over us at various stops at Cape May such as the state park, The Beanery, and Higbee Beach.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorrhous mexicanus*) – A couple of flyovers is about all we managed of this introduced species. [I]

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – We tallied this small finch a couple of times including at Forsythe NWR.

Passerellidae (New World Sparrows)

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammospiza maritima*) – This coastal species is a specialty of the saltmarshes and this tour is a good one to try to see this secretive guy. We managed to pull one out of the saltmarsh along Shell Bay Landing.

SALT MARSH SPARROW (*Ammospiza caudacuta*) – Like the previous species, this is a specialty of the diminishing saltmarsh habitat. Although it required walking out off the road a little bit, one of these eventually did pop up for a few seconds.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – We played tag with a couple of these compact little sparrows at Two Mile Landing and then again at Forsythe NWR.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – A fantastic species that we got to enjoy a couple of times. Our first looks were of a couple from Forsythe NWR but after that, all our sightings were of flyover flocks at Cape May.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – A common and widespread marsh-loving species that we tallied nearly every day.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Only a few of these usually-common icterids were seen on this trip.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – With long tails, these were pretty easy to identify! These big grackles were fairly common along the shoreline and saltmarshes.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – We were walking along the edge of the woods at Higbee when we caught sight of a couple of these warblers, strolling around up ahead of us. We watched as they walked in and out of the woods, a really neat encounter.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Creeping up and down the branches like a nuthatch, this spiffy warbler was spotted a few times including at Higbee Beach.

TENNESSEE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) – Although this is a pretty uncommon warbler for Cape May in the fall, there was no doubt about the bird we had near the Northwood Center. The entire birding group on the road that day got good looks.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – This masked warbler popped into view a couple of times, often from cattails.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – This turned out to be one of the more common warblers we encountered on the second half of the tour. At this season, not a lot of them are the bold black/orange.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – How fitting to see this species at Cape May! We saw some foraging in the pines right along the driveway to Cape May Point State Park.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – There were times where it seemed like all we were seeing were parulas!

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – The black, squared-off tip to the tail really helped make this bird stand out. These were seen several times later in the tour.

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER (*Setophaga castanea*) – A pretty uncommon bird for this tour! We found one of these in the big warbler flock next to the Northwood Center.

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER (*Setophaga fusca*) – A rather uncommon migrant warbler, one of these was seen very briefly high up near the Northwood Center.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – A rather plain fall warbler, one of these was mixed in with one of those big warbler flocks we worked at the Northwood Center.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – There was at least one of these in the big warbler flock we enjoyed at Northwood. We even noted the pale yellow color to the feet.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – A very handsome warbler, even in fall. We were lucky to enjoy several of these throughout the tour.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – These guys have that distinctive tail-bobbing behavior. We encountered several, especially along the field edges of the Higbee Beach fields.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Seen in a pine, go figure. Our best luck was along the driveway of Cape May Point State Park.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – Although the thickest numbers of these were yet to come, we were in Cape May about the time they started migrating south in earnest.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – We encountered a couple of these near the Northwood Center on a couple of days.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Fairly common.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – Although they didn't look like much at this season, this little species was seen several times, often in weedy/field edges.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Surprisingly, only tallied on one of our days! [I]

MAMMALS

WOODCHUCK (*Marmota monax*) – Not a very common mammal here; one of these was seen on our third day.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – This was the only species of squirrel we saw on our trip.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Seen along the back edge of Bunker Pond on our first day.

Herps

AMERICAN BULLFROG (*Lithobates catesbeianus*) – One of these was in a pond at Cox Hall WMA on our final day.

RED-EARED SLIDER (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) – The turtles on the first day were probably this species.

SOUTHERN GRAY TREEFROG (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – Spotted sitting a thin tree branch near the Northwood Center.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 125 bird taxa and 3 mammal taxa